

Employee Influencer Management: Evidence from State-owned Enterprises in Indonesia

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to explore how Indonesian State-owned Enterprises (SOEs) select and ‘manage’ employee influencers in order to engage more effectively with younger generations.

Design/methodology/approach - The study applies a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were obtained by analysing Instagram content with samples for analysis being taken from company-related posts from June 2018 to June 2020. Qualitative data collection was by two focus group discussions (FGD). The FGDs comprised in total, 22 employee influencers representing the 11 sectors of SOEs (State-owned Enterprises) in Indonesia.

Findings - The article examines how employee influencers engage with others; how they are chosen by their organizations; how they are managed and the support they need from their employers. It was discovered that a careful triangulation is required between employees as influencers, their followers and SOE communication hubs. A key factor is maintaining the authentic relationship between employee influencers and their followers. A conceptual model of employee influencer management for Indonesia is proposed.

Practical or Scholarly Implications - The research provides useful insights for communication management, marketing, and human resources in developing and supporting the role of employee influencers. The suggested model is of practical utility for SOEs for managing employee influencers in Indonesia and provides valuable indicators for other countries.

Originality/value - The study of SOEs’ employee influencers has not been explored previously in the literature. This, combined with the Indonesian perspective, brings new insights to the field. Social media use is especially high in Indonesia, so it acts as a good exemplar for the field. It also builds on the growing literature about the importance of employees as influencer, especially in the social media space. The model also makes a theoretical contribution.

Keywords: Communication Hub, Employee Influencer, Influencer Management, Model of Influencer Management

Paper type: Research Paper

Introduction

Nowadays social media influencers face challenges to their authenticity (Audrezet *et al.*, 2018), with a lack of sincerity, transparency and truthfulness (Lee and Eastin, 2021) that leads to a decrease of trust both by companies who may use them as advocates and from their followers. At the same time, employees' roles as influencers has risen (Andersson, 2019). The Edelman Trust Barometer (2020) finds that employees are rated as a credible source by 54% of respondents, higher than journalists who score just 36%. Employees' as social media influencers is a topic of interest because they play various roles as online advocates, ambassadors and informal spokespersons (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2016; Warburton and Troester, 1997). Employee influencer voices are proven in building a company's reputation, image, and brand (Ruck *et al.*, 2017).

Since 2018, the government in Indonesia has had an objective to recruit 3,000 social media employee influencers from Millennials via its "Millennial Program". These employee influencers are expected to attract followers from the public with the aim of socializing and promoting the corporate brands, products, and services of State Owned Enterprises (SOEs) to broader audiences. Those who become employee influencers do not necessarily have to have the largest number of followers; most important is that they should be influential in social media (Peters *et al.*, 2013).

Prior research has discussed the importance of organizations guiding employee influencers and putting in place a governance system to support, and to an extent, control them (Andersson, 2019). Since the flow of information in a company is dynamic, employee advocates need advice in terms of social media utilization on behalf of their organizations (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2016). The factors to be considered in employee social media governance and to generate employee advocates have already been identified, for instance, favourable organization-employee relationships generally, authentic communication practices, commitment and leadership, good relationships with employee advocates, and motivation (Van den Berg and Verhoeven, 2015; Dreher, 2014; Koporcic and Halinen, 2018; Linke and Zerfass, 2012).

Accordingly, the purpose of this research is to examine how employee influencers are selected and 'managed' by their SOE, including what support they need from their employers. The research proposes practical actions and a theoretical model of employee influencer management that adds to knowledge in the field and thereby makes an important practical and theoretical contribution.

Literature

There is an extensive literature on employee engagement and advocacy, social media engagement and managing social media engagement and this article does not attempt to undertake an extensive literature review into these areas. However, to provide context and theoretical underpinning, in a brief and selective overview of the literature, some of the main areas pertinent to this article are touched on. These concern the link between employee advocacy and employee influencers; the creation of 'authentic relationships' as this relates to influencers and followers and influencers and their organizations; the 'management' of employee influencers and the support and guidance they require. Two things should be noted at this stage: first it is recognised that influencers cannot be 'managed': they are free agents

who make their own choices. In addition, they are employees, but they also have private lives and as social media influencers the two are intertwined. To maintain their credibility in both domains of life they have to develop their own voice and persona (see more below). Their activities cannot be totally regulated and managed by their organization, neither should they be otherwise they lose the very value they have – being seen as authentic and genuine. It is their recognised role as promoters and supporters of their employing organization that is the focus of study here– they may well comment on their organizations in other contexts, but this is outside the scope of this article. Second, it is recognized that other employees outside this recognised group will also comment on their organizations, be influencers and will have an impact. Again, this is not considered in this article. Third, the focus here is only on the potential customers of SOE's, although it is acknowledged that many other stakeholders including employees, regulators, suppliers, partners, activist groups etc. will also see the on-line material posted by influencers.

Employee Advocacy and Employee Influencers

Previous research indicates that social media increases loyalty and generates additional word of mouth (De Veirman *et al.* (2017). Employee influencers utilizing social media have become an integral part of corporate communications strategies, and they are powerful channels to reach and engage with external audiences (Gagne', 2019). For the sake of clarity, this article uses the term employee influencer rather than employee advocate. The roles of both are essentially the same except that employee advocates can and do operate in both on-line and off-line environments.

In this article, the term 'employee influencer' is used to describe advocacy narrowly. Employee influencer in the context of this article is defined as an informal company spokesperson who is an employees of an organisation and who, in addition to their normal paid role, advocates, narrates and communicates company products and services to their friends and followers.

The emergence of employee influencers in companies is forcing a change in communication protocols. Previously and typically, the organization's official information was filtered and distributed by public relations or corporate communication, with some exceptions, such as CEOs or other designated individuals who were authorized to speak. The rise of employee influencers who are authorized to convey corporate information and messages to their followers adds a new dimension to corporate communication and this raises governance and management issues around how employee influencer activity is treated by the company.

The growth of the internet and diverse media platforms has led to employees using their personal social media accounts to organically share work-related content. Organizations have realised that this presents them with an opportunity to influence public perceptions of their brands in the digital environment (Jacobsen, 2020). Organizations assign employees to fulfil several roles such as disseminating information, as ambassadors, helping to manage stakeholder relationships and managing ambassadorship (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2014). However, it is critical for an organization to 'manage' the content delivered by their employee to the public since it could contain either unwitting or deliberately negative content about of the organization (Walden and Westerman, 2018). What to do about and with those who

disseminate deliberately negative content is not covered in this article since they cannot be regarded as advocates as such.

The Management of Influencers

Organizations clearly wish to work with employee influencers for organisational benefit. When employees share organizational ‘stories’ they can create an emotional connection with a whole range of stakeholders, including customers – the primary target group for many organisations (Jayasuriya et al., 2017). It helps to construct the corporate brand (Koporcic and Halinen, 2018), boost the engagement and relationship between the organization and the public (Cour, 2019); develop corporate engagement (Thelen and Men, 2020) employee engagement (Snyder and Honig, 2016), assist with marketing efforts (Thomas, 2020), and for the employee, enhance employee reputation (Akgunduz and Sanli, 2017).

Previous research findings shows that social media aimed internally in organisations has four key affordances: association, persistence, editability, and visibility (Treem and Leonardi, 2013) However, Rice et al (2017), exploring the external use of social media provide an expanded and revised list of six key affordances: pervasiveness, editability, self-presentation, searchability, visibility and awareness. Influencers also facilitate the sharing of information and help cultivate relationships by establishing authentic, symmetrical, and transparent communication (Men and Stacks, 2014) and as indicated above, these factors are crucial in gaining followers’ trust. Additionally, and importantly from the organizational viewpoint, effective management of employee influencer activity aligns customer and company expectations (Jayasuriya et al., 2017). Thus, the literature is conclusive in its view that the potency of employee influencers is such that it should not go unharnessed or ungoverned.

Authentic Relationships

At the core of influencer credibility and trust is authenticity. They have to be seen to be sincere, transparent and truthful (Lee and Eastin, 2021). The concept of authentic relations has been discussed in many arenas including marketing (Dickinson, 2011), branding (Audrezet *et al.* 2018), psychology (Wang, 2015) and leadership (Men and Stacks, 2014). Authenticity in social media is considered an essential variable in communication (Molleda, 2010). In marketing, authenticity is the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as being loyal to itself, loyal to its consumers, upholding responsibility and care so that both the product and consumers are associated with honesty themselves (Herzfeld, 2020). Authenticity must be able to embrace the interactions, experiences, hopes, and aspirations expected by the public so that companies can engage more deeply and as such requires a level of management in order to ensure assertions and expectations are aligned (Audrez *et al.* 2018).

Employee social media users face the dilemma of presenting themselves in a preferred or authentic way to others (Bailey. *et al.*, 2020). To be authentic means to say honestly who you are, what you do, and whom you serve (Thornton, 2018). Therefore, companies need to establish guiding principles which will not threaten authenticity, but will at the same time support employees’ actions on their behalf. Interestingly, previous literature shows how companies intentionally separate the image they project of their organization from commercial activities (Luxton, 2005), which provides an interesting dynamic for employee influencers who are contributing to the image their companies which they generate through their organization-

related posts, and whose purpose, as far as customer stakeholders is concerned, is commercial. Hence the importance of aligning influencer, customer and company expectations as indicated in the management of influencers.

In the context of the literature alluded to above and to address the aim of this study, three research questions were framed:

RQ1: How are employee influencers chosen by their organization?

RQ2: How are employee influencers managed by the organization?

RQ3: What support do employee influencers need?

Research Methodology

The study employed mix-methods research: content analysis and focus group discussion. Quantitative data was retrieved by conducting a content analysis of the social media activity of SOEs employee influencers on the Instagram platform. Instagram was selected for content analysis because it is a popular social media (has more than 800 million users), especially in Indonesia and is considered a relevant platform for branding corporations (De Veirman *et al.*, 2017; Gräve, 2019). The use of employees' personal social media for company content on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter has been examined by scholars in the past (Zoonen *et al.*, 2018; Zoonen and Treem, 2019), therefore, the extension of research to examine employee influencers posts on Instagram again adds to knowledge in the field. Furthermore, Instagram is the mandatory platform stipulated by the Government of Indonesia for its SOE employee influencer program (see Introduction above). It is recognised that influencers might use several platforms, but for the reasons given above, Instagram is the social platform chosen for study.

For the qualitative research, focus group discussions (FGDs) were chosen to explore influencer management from the influencers' perspective and to investigate the factors that currently do and that they would wish to support them.

Sample Criteria

The research sample was twenty two (22) employee influencers in the eleven (11) strategic industries that comprise the Indonesian SOE sector. Purposive and snowballing sampling was used to choose individuals from each sector. Researchers collaborated with the Indonesian SOE Public Relations Association and used their own network to identify suitable participants: the researcher worked in the SEO industry until 2019 as a senior public relations practitioner. Individuals were chosen using the four criteria stipulated in the Millennial Program: they met the requirement for a minimum number of 1000 followers; were a maximum of 35 years of age (millennials); Instagram active users and contributors to the SOE's influencer program. Influencers can be said to be active when uploading at least thirty Instagram posts about SOEs in the past two years (Boerman, 2020).

Content analysis

Content analysis was conducted to examine employee influencers' patterns of communication activity as formal employee influencers. They posted on other topics and mentioned their organisation in other contexts, but this was excluded in this study. Their Instagram posts were in various forms, including text, pictures, and video (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) and those that were in the public sphere, were collected from June 2018 to June 2020. They were obtained

through a partnership with a data analytics company based in Indonesia. Data search was performed using specific hashtags and work-related keywords (Arief and Pangestu, 2021; Lázaro-Rodríguez, 2020; Tang *et al.*, 2020) used by the SOE influencers. A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media websites and applications and identifies messages on a specific topic. Hashtags are created carefully to elevate the company's social media profile (Rauschnabel *et al.*, 2019; Small, 2011). Based on the recommendations of the Government's Millennial Program, contents that are posted on social media use some hashtags that have been determined by the guidelines from the Ministry of SOEs, i.e. #sobatbumn (*SOE Friend*), #bumnuntukindonesia (*SOEs for Indonesia*), #bumnspiritofmillenial, #spiritmillenial, and #BUMNhadiruntuknegeri (*SOEs for the Country*) and hashtags are also created by employee influencers in each company. In addition to hashtags, the research also used sector keywords, such as "oil and gas", "electricity" and "pharmacy" to categorize posts that matched with the millennial influencer's job. For example, for one of the millennial influencers from a government electricity provider company, words such as fixing; electricity; on the job; etc. were used as keywords. By concentrating on these hashtags and words, the data search results focused more on what was regarded as the most relevant content. It is accepted that some work-related content might have been missed using this method, but a sizable sample was obtained: a total of 1,265 specific and related posts.

User engagement is known as one of the important goals of social media activities (Wadhwa *et al.*, 2017). The researchers analyzed the follower's level of engagement by evaluating the number of likes, comments, follower count, and domain of interest (Tafesse and Wood, 2021). Engagement is defined as a "user-assessed action" that leads to the "co-creation" of value and in social media refers to each time a user reacts to content. Gräve (2019) and Tafesse and Wood (2021) proposed that evaluation of individual performance for social media influencers can be based on a quantitative matrix consisting of: the number of followers, the number of likes, performance matrix "reach", number of interactions, sentiment, and domain of interest. Interactions in social media are divided into three categories: conversation (comments), amplification (share), and applause (like, love, emoji, and click) (Kaushik, 2008). Engagement rates can be calculated using the classification of engagement levels: very high for above 6%; high for 3.6% - 6%; average/ good for 1% - 3.5%; and low engagement for less than 1% (Gräve, 2019).

The elements identified were posts related to job activity and company insights, how companies were presented in the post, the number of likes, comments, user-follower interaction, and content attractiveness. An analysis of followers was conducted to examine their engagement with influencers. Only content regarding the influencer's company was analysed to avoid irrelevant data.

Focus Group Discussions

For triangulation and deeper insights, additional qualitative data were obtained through two FGDs to increase understanding of the employee influencer selection process, employee influencer management, and employee influencer support. This data collection was especially pertinent to RQ2 and RQ3. Each FGD consisted of participants from the 11 various industries making up the SOE sector, with a total of 22 participants. Due to Covid 19 being severe in Indonesia, both FGDs were conducted on-line. The researchers moderated the session to ensure

all voices were heard. The researchers acknowledge that they were unable to capture non-verbal cues fully, however they attempted to replicate face to face conditions as far as possible. The FGDs were conducted for the first group on July 15, 2020, attended by 10 participants and for the second FGD on August 17, 2020, attended by 12 participants.

The participants were selected based on the sample criteria outlined above. The facilitators directed the FGD using three main questions as a guide, with latitude allowed to participants to add information that they deemed appropriate:

- How are employee influencers chosen by their organization? (related to RQ1)
- How are employee influencers ‘managed’? (related to RQ2)
- What support are employee influencers given/would like? (related to RQ3)

Qualitative analysis was conducted through data reduction (coding), data interpretation and data representation (Rambocas and Pacheco, 2018). This procedure was used to decipher, examine, compare, and categorize content.

Results

The results are presented in sequential order, with the content analysis of the Instagram posts first and then the FGD outcomes.

Employee Influencers Engagement with Followers.

The content analysis of the Instagram posts is presented here. The percentage of engagement rates for each sector in Figure 1 is based on the calculation of the total response of the activity to the total reach in employee influencer posts. Using the classification of engagement levels provided by Gräve (2019), three sectors have high engagement rates (3.6% - 6%): Aviation and Airlines 3 (4.71%), Oil and Gas 2 (4.61%), and Port Services 1 (4.24%). However it is notable that the employee influencers from these sectors have a low level of SOE and hashtags related posts compared to those with lower engagement (Figure 2).

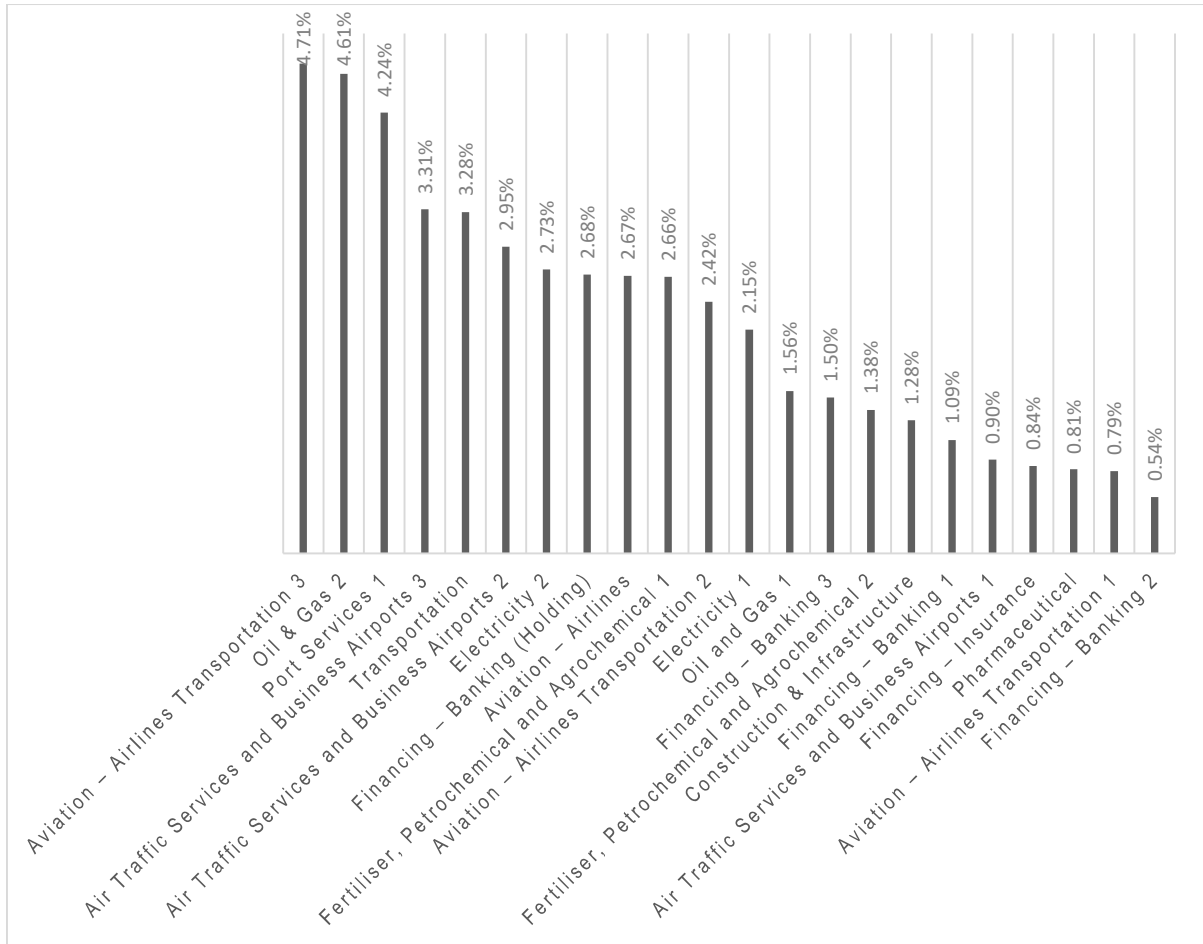


Figure 1. Engagement rates for each sector, in rank order of level of engagement

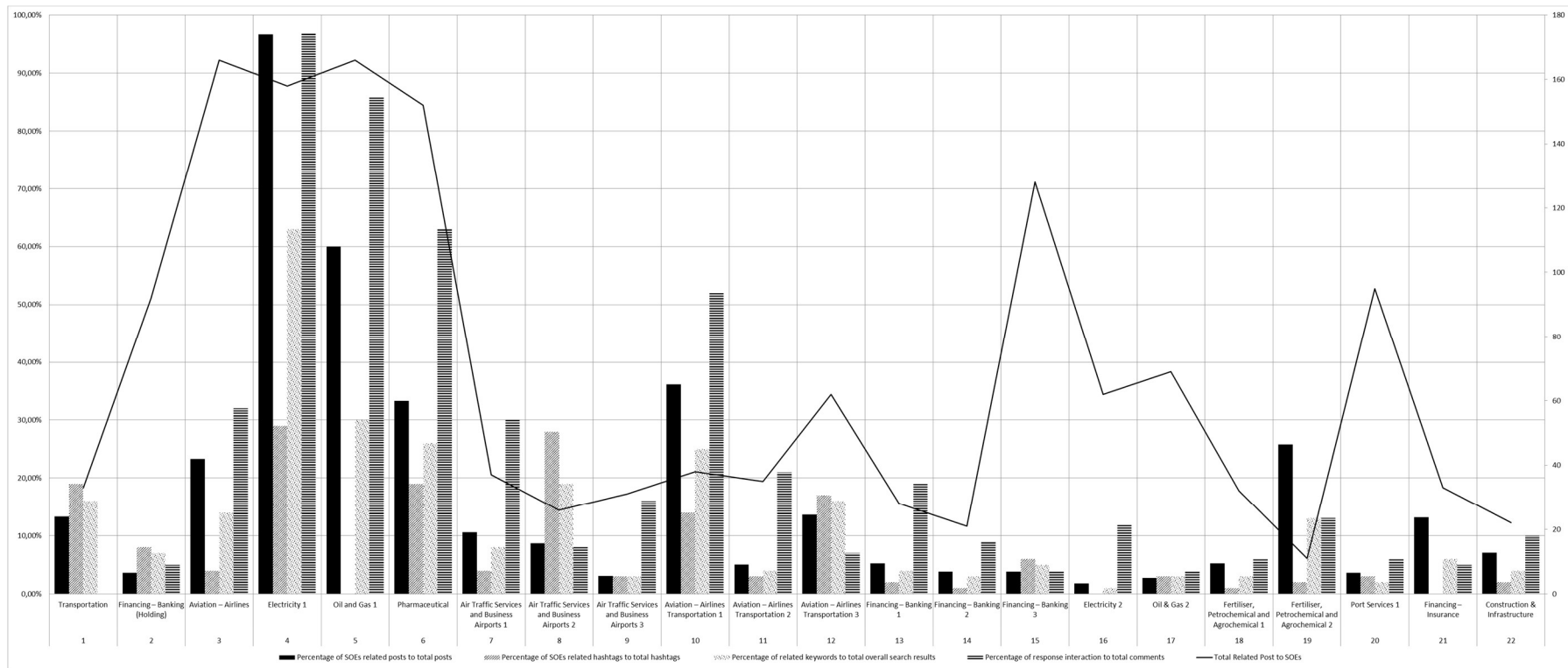


Figure 2. Engagement rates and components of employee influencer posts

The engagement rate was further analysed by data crawling (Table 1). Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that: a low percentage of a related hashtag does not generate a low engagement response; conversely, high levels of related posts and hashtags does not mean a high response. The data further shows that the number of posts, hashtags, and keywords does not affect the interaction and engagement of the followers.

The diverse content merited further analysis of the categories of high, medium, or low engagement based on Gräve's (2019) criteria (Table 1) the results shows that the nature of the content crucially affects the frequency and engagement rate of the audience (Arora *et al.*, 2019; Wong *et al.*, 2010).

The table below shows the post frequency and the engagement level of followers based on post types and their content. Hobbies (traveling, culinary, books, movies) and daily activities (helping others, sports activities supported by companies, charity programs, community work, daily work) are the post types that result in high engagement levels with high and average frequency achieving high engagement levels, while even low frequency prompts average engagement. These types of posts made by those sectors with high engagement, such as Aviation, Airlines & Transportation; Air Traffic Services and Business Airports 3, Oil & Gas, Financing and the Banking industry had significant content about their daily jobs, working environment, work in their sector (aircrew life) that is challenging and risky, showing the picture from the internal perspective on areas that are forbidden to external audiences such as flight services and maintenance. On posts related to family, a high frequency of posts results in average engagement of followers and average and low frequency reduces engagement to low levels. Family-related posts were delivered by Transportation, Financing, and Banking industry. The analysis shows that the frequency level of posts involving customer information (regarding products, job vacancies, company-supported community programs) is the same as the engagement level, i.e. if the frequency level is high, engagement level will be high. Such posts are evident in Construction & Infrastructure, Pharmaceutical and Banking. Finally, posts containing quotes and motivations stimulate a low engagement level from followers for every frequency level. Quotes and motivation posts are delivered more frequently by Port Services, Fertiliser, Petrochemical and Agrochemical industry.

Respondent (R)	Type of Industry	Total Related Post to SOEs	Percentage of SOEs related posts to total posts	Percentage of SOEs related hashtags to total hashtags	Percentage of related keywords to total overall search results	Percentage of response interaction to total comments	Engagement Rate	Rate Level (High (H), Medium (M), Low (L))
1	Transportation	33	13,33%	19%	16%	0%	3,28%	M
2	Financing – Banking (Holding)	92	3,60%	8%	7%	5%	2,68%	M
3	Aviation – Airlines	166	23,33%	4%	14%	32%	2,67%	M
4	Electricity 1	158	96,67%	29%	63%	97%	2,15%	M
5	Oil and Gas 1	166	60,00%	0%	30%	86%	1,56%	M
6	Pharmaceutical	152	33,33%	19%	26%	63%	0,81%	L
7	Air Traffic Services and	37	10,62%	4%	8%	30%	0,90%	L

	Business Airports 1							
8	Air Traffic Services and Business Airports 2	26	8,68%	28%	19%	8%	2,95%	M
9	Air Traffic Services and Business Airports 3	31	3,06%	3%	3%	16%	3,31%	M
10	Aviation – Airlines Transportation 1	38	36,12%	14%	25%	52%	0,79%	L
11	Aviation – Airlines Transportation 2	35	5,05%	3%	4%	21%	2,42%	M
12	Aviation – Airlines Transportation 3	62	13,65%	17%	16%	7%	4,71%	H
13	Financing – Banking 1	28	5,25%	2%	4%	19%	1,09%	M
14	Financing – Banking 2	21	3,81%	1%	3%	9%	0,54%	L
15	Financing – Banking 3	128	3,81%	6%	5%	4%	1,50%	M
16	Electricity 2	62	1,83%	0%	1%	12%	2,73%	M
17	Oil & Gas 2	69	2,75%	3%	3%	4%	4,61%	H
18	Fertiliser, Petrochemical and Agrochemical 1	32	5,25%	1%	3%	6%	2,66%	M
19	Fertiliser, Petrochemical and Agrochemical 2	11	25,81%	2%	13%	13%	1,38%	M
20	Port Services 1	95	3,66%	3%	2%	6%	4,24%	H
21	Financing – Insurance	33	13,15%	0%	6%	5%	0,84%	L
22	Construction & Infrastructure	22	7,08%	2%	4%	10%	1,28%	M

Table 1. More detailed Engagement Analysis adding total number of posts and categorizing engagement rates

Based on the content analysis of 22 employee influencers' Instagram activity monitored over the two years (Figure 2 and Table 1), the frequency of employees posting company-related content can be seen to be either rare or frequent. Employee influencers who only posted SOEs-related content had lower engagement rates with followers (0.54%) compared to those with diverse content who had high engagement (4.71%). Diversity of content means that the employee influencers cover a range of topics and activities, such as sharing hobbies, family-related material, daily activity as well as corporate content. Moreover, they also often combine the content, for instance, linking their hobby to corporate content. This means that employee influencers need a content approach that combines corporate with more personalized and humanised content in order to build a relationship (Hsiung, 2012, Chaudhri *et al*, 2021). The results show that through a variety of posts, influencers secure an opportunity to form a multi-stranded relationship; they help to make the brand more personal to their followers and

maintain their interest by offering additional content that will appeal to their other interests. To obtain additional data in order to answer the three research questions, FGDs were conducted with employee influencers and the results are presented here, organised in sequence with the research questions. Quotations are taken from transcriptions of the FGDs.

Employee Influencers Selection

To select volunteers, corporate communication or communication hubs used three criteria: how supportive of the company employees were; the level of engagement with followers they already had; and their willingness to commit to certain activities on behalf of the company. Recruits were drawn from corporate communications and other areas of the company.

“Recruitment of employee influencers are initially volunteers, but companies manage employee influencer candidates who are suitable in order to promote the company's reputation. Through employee influencers, brands can be better known by the public”. (Respondent (R) 17)

“Our company has a similar approach. However, only employees who have more than 1000 followers are involved in the program.” (R 22)

Employee Influencers Management

Once selected, employee influencers are then placed within a management/governance framework. Some are given tailored workshops and guidance concerning social media, its management, standard operating procedures for employee social media work, on corporate plans and new products, although it was found that many companies do not have specific and clear guidelines for employee influencers.

“After the selection process, we have social media training provided by Corporate Communication.” (R21).

They are also made aware of the importance of their role and the standards expected of them. For those who are not trained in communication or advocacy, some companies provide guidance. It is made clear that their role as an agent or brand ambassador of the company is to share positive information with the public regularly and, in times of crisis or when exposed to negative issues, to convey facts about the company. Employee influencer management also involves seeking to align them with company goals, including company values and identity (Thelen, 2020).

“All employee influencers are aware that they are employee influencers, the company's advocates and voice, becoming intermediaries between employers and consumers. Having guidance on content standardization, including how and what should be posts, improves the quality and alignment of their content” (R14).

Supporting Employee Influencers

The FGDs were able to identify the specific factors that were important to support employee influencers in their work. The management frameworks mentioned above are meant not only to ensure good governance and effective activity, but also as support. It was clear other elements were crucial for influencers.

The relationship with the followers

Employee influencers agree that, most importantly, they need and want to maintain a good relationship with followers (Boerman, 2020; Lou and Yuan, 2019). A good relationship facilitates good communication and vice versa and could significantly increase the effectiveness of their role for the company (Breves *et al.*, 2019; Jun and Yi, 2020). The results of FGDs indicate a number of steps can be taken to improve relationships with followers (see also below on authenticity):

First clarity on what the company expects so that followers are not confused or misled and so that influencers understand what is expected of them:

“the company should create guidelines for the team to follow, including the words used, the “vibe” displayed, and the ethics of the brand, what to post, what not to post”

Employee influencers also appreciate advice on the type of content they should produce so that it builds relationships with followers. Relatability is an important consideration:

“employees influencers are recommended to share posts about their daily life, answer customer questions, and publish ‘best tips’ for product use”

SOE corporate communication departments can also advise on how to make content attractive and visible and in practical terms, can provide social media assets to help, such as poll formats and visual materials. Assets that are editable are especially useful:

“the posts should be made attractive for followers using fun contents, filters, emojis, or polls”

Recommendations on how to increase engagement opportunities and how to introduce variety into the way they interact with followers are also valued in order to strengthen relationships and make them multi-dimensional:

“influencers should use many ways to maintain the relationship with followers, such as creating posts about their daily lives, hobbies and interests because this expands the number of potential connection points and thereby strengthens the relationship”

Employee Influencer Group or Team Identities & Content

The challenge of managing employee influencers from the company point of view, according to the influencers, begins with forming the employee influencer group and a group identity. Then, creating content and hashtags that matches the target audience and relates with

the company's products and services. This process requires careful consideration, including choosing a name for the employee influencer group. When selecting content and hashtags, employee influencers should be involved. They need to be comfortable with these decisions since their identities, reputations and authenticity are directly affected. FGDs results indicate that all respondents are aware of the importance of employee influencer group identity and these are chosen specifically for their work as employee influencers – they are not the same as the ones they use as private individuals. Examples of group identities include, Pelindo Digiforce (PT Pelindo), AdhiSocial Ranger (PT Adhi Karya), Biodigi Troops (PT Bio Farma), Mandirians (Bank Mandiri), and many more.

Engagement is crucially affected by the type content about company's products and events that is posted (Schouten *et al.*, 2020; Woods, 2016).

“When the products or services posted match their followers' interests, engagement levels show a significant increase. For example, when followers are teenagers and the post advertises a pension fund, there is low engagement. However, when the products are about banking apps, the engagement is higher”

The above statements show how important the relatability of content is. Thus, it is necessary to consider the followers of social media and their needs and wants, including what is emotionally resonant, before posting and promoting the services or products of company.

“In some industrial sectors, such as pharmacy, mining, energy, electricity, and aviation, by creating content about their daily jobs, employee influencers also convey that working in their sector is challenging and involving risk. While this kind of message is not intentionally created and planned by the company, most followers react by showing respect and gratitude for the job these influencers are doing for their customers. The inference to be drawn from this is that followers will give a high positive response to posts that are natural or unintentional and will pay more attention if they can be considered inspiring and motivating”

Tonality, that is *how* they convey their daily work such as demonstrating their professionalism by exposing the challenges and the risks involved stimulates a positive reaction of the followers towards the companies.

Authenticity

As mentioned earlier there are challenges around the authenticity of influencers when they advocate on behalf of their organizations. As individuals they are concerned that this should be preserved so that their influencing remains credible. Companies can support them in these efforts by recognising the issues involved.

“The company encourages us to disclose in our profile ‘who we are’, like personal information and transparency about our company, our position and our affiliation”

Employee influencers also need to be granted a level of latitude in adjusting content to the needs of particular audiences.

“There is a content adjustment for maintaining authenticity based on the location. For example, we have guidance on content or campaign from the headquarters in Jakarta. However, we in the branch office are allowed to adjust the content based on the areas such as Sumatra, Banda Aceh, Central Java, West Java. To engage with our followers, sometimes, we post content about ourselves, and use local wisdom or native languages ...Sundanese, Javanese... where the branch or company is located.”

Reward

The results from the FGDs show that financial reward is not a priority for employee influencers. The main drivers are to improve employee social relations, for self-development, job satisfaction, personal influence, status and self-actualisation. This benefits both employers and employees (Fletcher *et al.*, 2014; Tanwar and Prasad, 2016; Walden and Westerman, 2018). In line with these findings, the rewards for the employees are varied depending on the company policy.

“There is no fixed reward given to motivate employee influencers to promote their SOEs. Being part of the program means employees can have an influential role in the company, build a professional social network, experience more involvement with internal and external contacts, develop meaningful relationships with all stakeholders, and progress in their careers. Usually, we do not receive financial rewards, however, we have higher job satisfaction, can participate in a program that offers opportunities for self-development, or have an opportunity for self-actualization”

Discussion

Based on the results overall, several factors emerge as important. First, the selection of influencers (RQ1: How are employee influencers chosen by their organization?) is relatively straightforward in this study, with key criteria being: minimum number of followers of 1000; maximum age 35 years *‘from millennial and gen z generation who are active in the social media’*; minimum of 30 Instagram posts, about their SOE in the past two years. Given that the SOE’s in this study were acting in accordance with the Indonesian Government’s objective to recruit social media employee influencers from Millennials in order to gain influence with followers in that group, it is clear that the age parameters were appropriate. It is arguable however, that restricting employee influencers to Millennial’s is just that: restrictive. There are others who may be valuable employee advocates. For example, older product experts with deep knowledge; long-standing employees who may act as conservers and promoters of a corporate narrative with substantial provenance; employees of all ages who can advocate that their organisation being an employer of choice; employees of different age groups who are able to

relate to Millennials; those on other age groups who have high levels of on-line expertise and have similar interests to the target age group and so on. Limiting employee influencers to specific age groups means that the advocacy achieved is also potentially limited. Variety spreads the potential for exploiting the affordances mentioned by Rice et al (2017).

Second, management of employee influencers (RQ2: How are employee influencers managed by the organization?) requires SOEs to be knowledgeable of and to provide guidance on the engagement effectiveness of influencers. The analysis of the posts provided in the Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 points to how they may begin this process. Maybe unsurprisingly, effectiveness appears to be critically affected by the basic content of posts. Most obviously, influencer content that is resonant with followers' interests is vital and when follower interests coincide with SOEs' products or services, higher engagement and responses are evoked. It is also advisable that when the influencers post about their organizations, it should be aligned with the SOEs business. For example, the influencer of a transportation SOE should be advised to post on travel topics.

Content diversity also significantly influences engagement rates as has been noted in the previous literature (Lee *et al.*, 2018; Meire *et al.*, 2019). Some influencers have the freedom to design their own content related to their employers, while others are provided with content to be posted, this finding supports previous research (Jin *et al.*, 2019). There are advantages and disadvantages to this. Freedom to create their own content allows influencers to use their own voice, tone and phrasing which adds to authenticity. However, low engagement is shown for some self-created posts because they do not explicitly capture the value-added of the company, and the content is unattractive. The research shows that high engagement comes from posts that successfully match the influencers and followers' interest and, at the same time, contain sufficient and engaging information about the SOE. For an example of this difference, one of the influencers for aviation-airlines with an engagement rate of 4.71, posted an artistic picture of his office building, and the response from the followers was not about the company but about photography tips. On the other hand, an influencer posted his travel itinerary with a picture of him in his company's transportation and followers' responses were about products, services, and prices. These findings indicate that content variety, creativity and a link making the company relevant are fundamentally important. Informative content alone is not sufficient to stimulate good engagement.

The findings overall confirm the affordances identified by Rice et al (2017) and the importance of the four crucial factors determining content i.e. that it be relatable, sharable, visible and editable. Alongside providing the research resource to help determine how and what to post to secure engagement, the results clearly identify that setting out clear policies and guidelines are significant in the management of employee influencers. The latter in particular provides security and safety for both parties and generates confidence. It is also clear that this management needs to be 'light touch', in fact the relationship may be more accurately described as a collaboration that has process on one side (for the SOE) and action on the other (by the influencer).

For RQ3 (What support do employee influencers need?) it is evident that the management measures put in place, particularly around content, can also be seen as support for employee influencers. In addition, they need training; materials such as images, videos and announcements to post; recognition that their own personal reputation for authenticity has to

be preserved; and, importantly recognition of their contribution. It is interesting that payment is not a principal motivator for employee influencers. Given that this group are Millennials, it would appear that the things that motivate them surfaced in this research, are networking and opportunities to be influential with other groups. This implies the creation of social capital and the opening up of training and opportunities for advancement point to career aspirations. Finally, it is clear that job satisfaction and self-actualisation are crucial elements.

In light of these findings, the following model for Employee influencer management is proposed.

Model for Employee Influencer Management

The research identified the need for management (RQ2) and support (RQ3) for employee influencers one they had been selected. The following model conceptualises this and also places followers in the model although they have not been the subjects of this research. This is because by recognising that the aim of influence is ultimately about followers being engaged, their inclusion provides a more complete picture of the influencer/SOE relationship. The three main components in the proposed Model of Employee Influencer Management comprise (1) a Communication Hub, established by the SOE (2) the Employee as Influencer, and (3) Followers.

The model consists of a communication hub that acts as an enabler and facilitator and which can serve and mediate the interests and requirements of both influencers and the SOE. The hub's relationship with the influencer is two-way, with the hub providing support (such as training, hashtags and campaign information) and the influencer creating customer engagement and support, even sales leads, and management information (such as opinions about products and company decisions). In practical terms this means an employee influencer is provided with guidance and standard operating procedure (SOP) by the communication hubs who also supply information and content that can be posted or shared through social media and advice on how to do this effectively. The communication hubs could be located in public relations, marketing, branding, or human resources, but ideally in public relations. The provision of photos, videos, memes, moments, press releases, company reports, product knowledge, campaigns, and specific hashtags should be provided by communication hubs in such a way as to enhance and realize the value of content on social media. Guidance and SOPs are also an essential 'safety measure' ensuring that influencers do not distribute restricted or confidential information about the company. This does not mean that the company has total control over employee influencers' social media: they have freedom to share or post company information within the guidance and with regard to their knowledge of their followers. Finally, the company rewards employees who actively share information on social media and have high engagement with their followers.

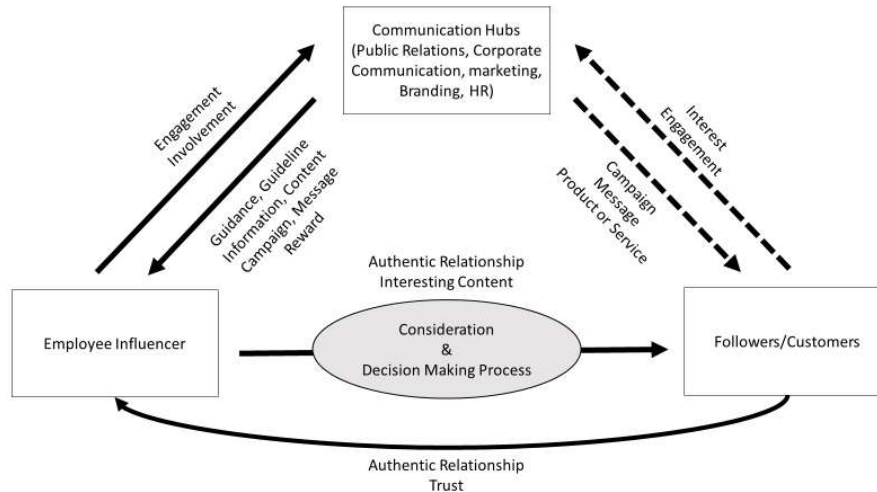


Figure 3. The Conceptual Model of Employee Influencer Management

The employee influencer’s relationship with followers is again two-way, with both influencer and follower benefiting from a mutual relationship where trust is generated through authentic engagement. The engagement is secured by the influencer producing relevant and interesting content which will prompt consideration and favourable opinions/decisions towards the SOE and recognition of this through tokens such as likes, re-posts, declarations of favourability/intentions to purchase and actual purchases (by followers). In the interests of authenticity, employee influencers independently share and post content about their lives or hobbies, stimulating followers’ interest in their social media and creating strong relationships. They also share and post information related to the company in line with good engagement practice and company guidelines in order to gain follower interest and potential action which is favourable to the SOE. The end purpose is to engage more effectively, especially with younger generations in order to create a more favourable impression of the SOE and lay the ground for them being more receptive to organizational messages, campaigns and sales.

Apart from their relationship with employee influencers, the model recognises that followers may have a direct or indirect relationship with the SOE (expressed in a dashed line). In Indonesia, most SOEs are well known, but not everyone has a direct relationship with them, such as being an employee or customer. However, they may well encounter other communication from these SEOs either from them or from Government, for example, from or about the pharmaceutical SEO’s on the safety of vaccines during the Covid 19 pandemic. Although not investigated in this research, the model recognises this reality and factors this in because there are consequences relating to this ‘contextual’ information which are outlined in the conclusions.

A vital role for both Communication Hubs and employee influencers is to listen and respond to followers either via influencers or directly where appropriate. They are an essential source of intelligence for SOEs, for example on challenges and opportunities, products and services, the effectiveness of advertising, competitor activity and follower views on company decisions. They can also be a “warning system” for any potential issues or crises. This can be especially effective if the communication flows are characterized by authenticity and trust. In addition,

followers' spontaneous responses could generate opportunities, for instance, for identifying new product/service opportunities, indicating appreciated work, and pointing to excellent customer service. The feedback of followers should be assessed by the Communication Hub not only for evaluation, future action and influencer reward purposes, but as part of ongoing monitoring so that influencers can be advised on any adjustments that need to be made to content, frequency, audio/visual preferences and so on. By understanding the needs and traits of followers, employee influencers could increase their impact significantly.

Conclusions and Directions for Future Research.

This research has answered three research questions that identified current gaps in knowledge. Employee influencer programs are increasingly prevalent, but empirical and theoretical investigation is lacking on this topic. The research outlined in this article provides both practical and theoretical contributions. Practically, this study shows that the engagement of employee influencers is a resource to be harnessed by organizations, but that this must be done with due regard to what is engaging to followers and to the needs of employee influencers, including their need to remain authentic and their requirement to be 'managed' sensitively and supported actively.

Theoretically the research has added to previous findings about company social media policy and governance by providing unique insights into practices in an Asian context and with SOE's: both under-researched areas. It has also generated a theoretical model which moves these investigations and discussions forward and which can be used to inform, and tested in practice.

In terms of the literature, the research adds to current knowledge by extending thinking. It has introduced the term 'employee influencers' and distinguishes them from 'employee advocates'. It has also found a linkage between social media affordance and authenticity practices by employee influencers. Regarding authenticity (Audrezer *et al.* 2018), is the insight that applying specific guidelines and transparency principles avoids the risk of confusing followers. Finally, the research finds that the management of employee influencers in Indonesia's SOEs need not affect their authentic relationship with followers.

The research opens up opportunities for further research, four of which are covered here. First, there is a rich seam of research around the interplay of 'contextual' factors and employee influencers. For example, are there sectoral, economic, social, political and cultural factors that affect their ability to be effective influencers and how these factors shape the nature of the relationships they form with followers. Second, this research addresses influencers sharing and posting content about the corporate organisation. It is recognised that they may also share other information about the company not strictly within their advocacy brief, for example, on the culture, relationship among employees, informal business practices and so on. These other conversations are worthy of investigation as is the interplay between the two. Third, this research found that employee influencers share and post content that has no association at all with their employer, but is about their personal lives and third party content. These other conversations and the linkages, if any, between their 'other' and corporate lives are worthy of further investigation, both from corporate and follower perspectives. Fourth, employee influencer content and relationships are possibly only one factor that affects follower

perspectives of SOEs, indeed of any corporate organisation. Identification of other main contemporary influences and a ranking of their importance would add a helpful perspective to the emerging picture about employee influencers.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations in this research which need to be acknowledged. First, the research setting and exploratory data do not allow for the generalizability of the findings to all social media: the research explored a certain timeline and Instagram only. Second, the sample for this research was one or a maximum of two representatives of each industry sector. Third, the study focused solely on millennials who were targeted by state-owned companies in Indonesia to become employee influencers.

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